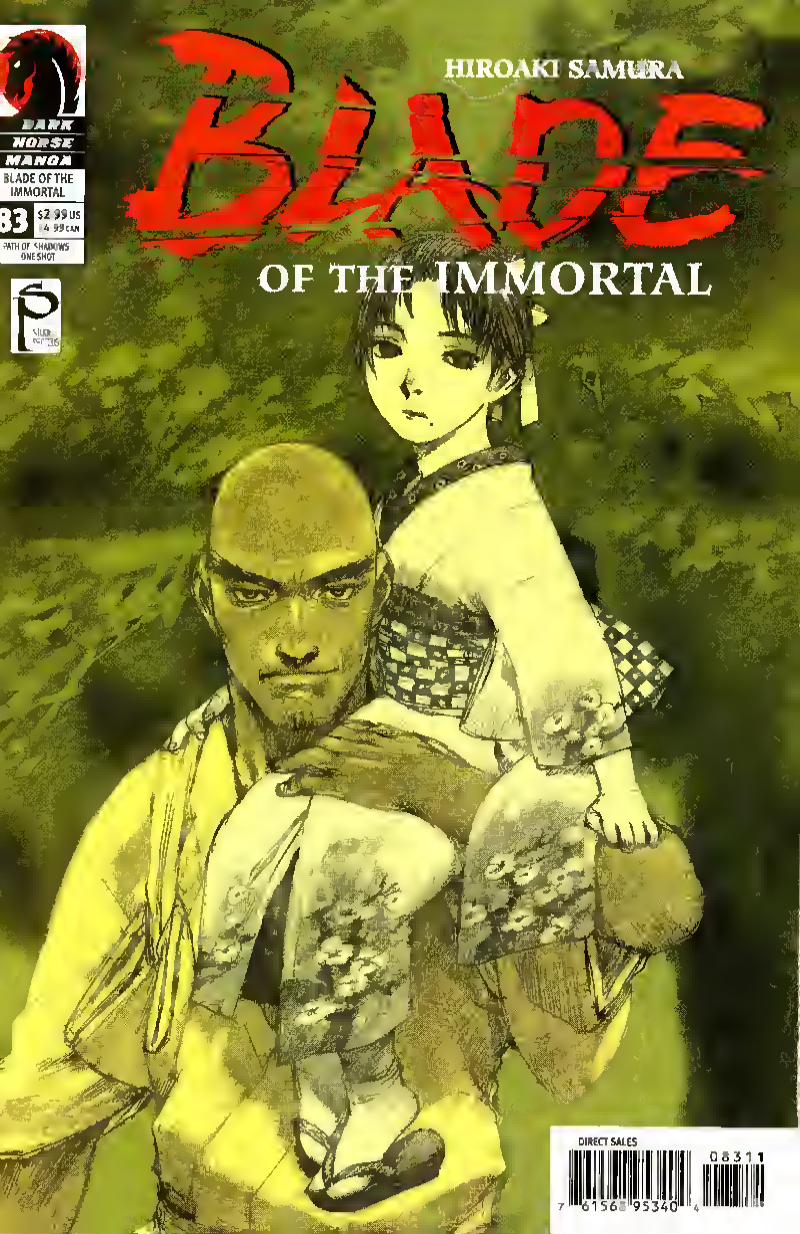
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OF THE IMMORTAL
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

CAST OF CHARACTERS

gumbo-
Immortal Scanner

yuneko
Nice enough to distro the stuff

THE STORY SO FAR

- Series: Blade of the Immortal
- Date: 2003 10 29
- Volume: 13?
- Chapter: 083
- Format: Left to Right
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No letters section in this issue

ENJOY!

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by

DANA LEWIS and TOREN SMITH

lettering and retouch by

TOMOKO SAITO

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI
Immortal *rōnin*

RIN
Last heir of the Mutenichi-*ryū dōjō* destroyed by Itō-*ryū*

ANOTSU
The leader of the Itō-*ryū* sword school

KENSHI
Head of the Shingyōtō-*ryū*

HISOKA
Bride to Anotsu agreed to marriage as part of an arrangement to merge the Shingyōtō-*ryū* into the Itō-*ryū*.

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessenchu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for the 100 good people who died at his hand under his corrupted lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Two years earlier, when her parents were murdered on her fourteenth birthday by Anotsu Kagehisa's Itto-*ryū* swordsmen, Rin Asano became part of a mad revenge cycle which began when Anotsu's grandfather was thrown out of the Asano clan's Mutenichi-*ryu dojo* fifty years before. A quest for vengeance was instilled in Anotsu, a similar quest now haunts Rin. Upon learning of Manji, she enlisted his aid to destroy the Itto-*ryu* and avenge her parents.

After leaving Manji to complete her quest alone, Rin prevails over great hardships and finally crosses paths with Anotsu, but she's overcome by hunger and exhaustion. In an attempt to throw him off guard, Rin asks if she can join the Ittō-*ryū*. Anotsu refuses, expecting a trick like this from Rin, and insults her fighting ability. Assassins then arrive to take Anotsu's life, but they are quickly cut down by his unique weapon. Upon realizing that these assassins were Kensui-*dono's* students, Anotsu runs back for an explanation. And our story continues –

designer DEBRA BAILEY assistant editor MICHAEL CAFFIGLIETTO & PHILIP W. SIMON editor TIM ERVIN-GJORE publisher MIKE RICHARDSON

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無限の住人

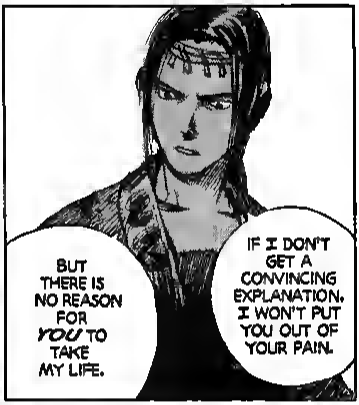
PATH OF SHADOWS

KENSUI-
DONO!

NNS...
A...
A...
A...
.....
ANOTSU-
DONO...
SO...
MY
STUDENTS....
YOU
DEFEATED...
THEM
ALL...?
N-NO...
IT'S
BETTER
THIS...
WAY...
YES...
I SEE...
.....

I AM THE *LEADER* OF THE *ITTŌ-RYŪ*. I'M USED TO HAVING SWORDS DRAWN AGAINST ME ON THE ROAD.
KENSUI-*DONO*...

MANY OF THE SWORDSMEN WHO'VE HAD THEIR *DOJŌ* SEIZED BY THE *ITTŌ-RYŪ* REFUSE TO JOIN US.
MANY OF THOSE HAVE GONE TO GROUND IN THE COUNTRYSIDE TO FIGHT US.


BUT THERE IS NO REASON FOR *YOU* TO TAKE MY LIFE.
IF I DON'T GET A CONVINCING EXPLANATION, I WON'T PUT YOU OUT OF YOUR PAIN.

ANOTSU-DONO... YESTERDAY, I...
DURING THE WEDDING... YOU SAW ME LEAVE MY SEAT?

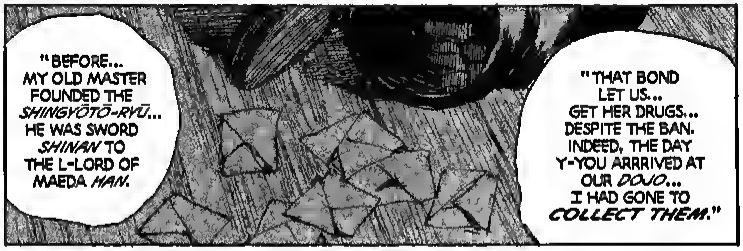
YES. I REMEMBER.
AT... AT THAT TIME...
AN EMISSARY... TOLD ME...

"C... CUT YOUR TIES WITH THE ITTŌ-RYŪ...
"...AND TAKE THEIR LEADER'S... LIFE."
AN EMISSARY... FROM WHO?

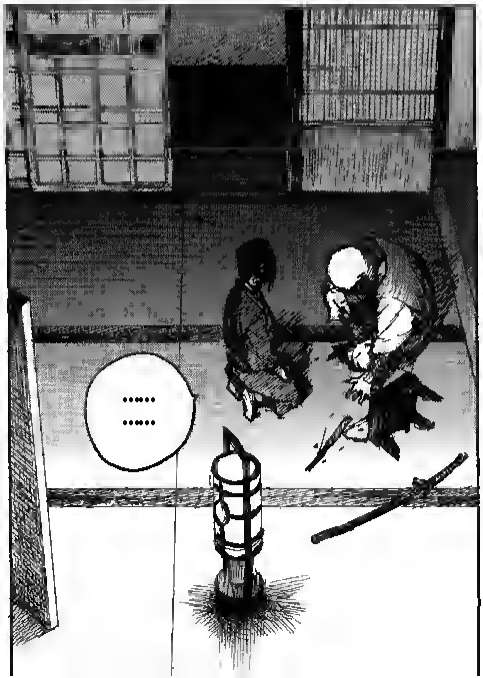
.....
.....
TH-
THE
BAKUFU...
.....
.....!
FROM
THE
BAKUFU
?!
GUKK
:koff:
:koff:

KENSUI-DONO...!
N-NO... DON'T WORRY.
I WON'T DIE... UNTIL I'M DONE.
ANOTSU-DONO... PATHETIC IT MAY SOUND, BUT...
I HAVE BUT ONE... WEAKNESS. STRIKE AT IT, AND I AM POWERLESS TO RESIST.
THAT WEAKNESS IS--
NO. I CAN GUESS.
ONLY ONE THING COULD TIP THE SCALE...
...FOR ONE WHO TREASURES HIS PROMISES AS MUCH AS YOU.

HISOKA-DONO'S LIFE.
.....
.....
.....
Y-YES...
I WON'T TELL YOU ITS NAME. BUT IF SHE DOESN'T GET A SPECIAL MEDI-CINE...
!!
WHAT HERBS--
N-NOT HERBS. NOT CHINESE. IT'S WESTERN... FORBID-DEN!
I HAD PLANNED... TO TELL YOU LATER.
BUT HER ILLNESS... IT'S FAR WORSE THAN YOU EVEN SUSPECT.
...IN TIME SHE BEGINS TO COUGH UP BLOOD. THEN, IN LESS THAN THREE DAYS, HER BREATH WOULD STOP FOREVER.
IT'S A HARSH DRUG...AND IN T-TIME IT WILL BLIND HER. BUT... HER LIFE C-COMES FIRST...
AND IT'S HER... ONLY HOPE....


"BEFORE... MY OLD MASTER FOUNDED THE *SHINGYŌTŌ-RYŪ*... HE WAS SWORD *SHINAN* TO THE L-LORD OF MAEDA *HAN*.
"THAT BOND LET US... GET HER DRUGS... DESPITE THE BAN. INDEED, THE DAY Y-YOU ARRRIVED AT OUR *DOJO*... I HAD GONE TO *COLLECT THEM*."

BUT... BUT BEFORE AN ORDER OF THE *BAKUFU*, SUCH BONDS ARE... AS NOTHING. THE EMISSARY TOLD ME...
"KEEP BUYING YOUR DRUGS, OR BE REFUSED THEM HENCEFORTH. ALL HANGS ON YOUR ANSWER!"

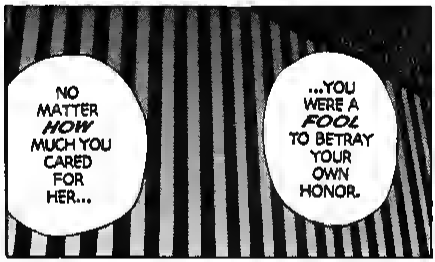

.....
.....

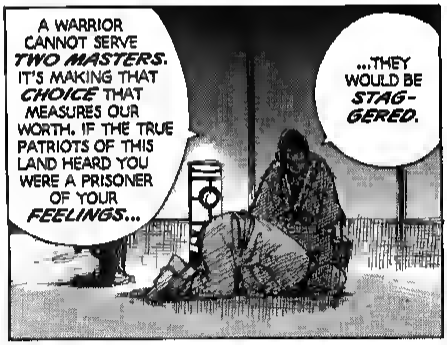
LAUGH AT ME... IF YOU WISH.
I NO LONGER UNDERSTAND... *ANYTHING*.

FOR TWENTY YEARS...
THAT CHILD'S HAPPI-NESS...
THAT'S ALL...
...ALL I THOUGHT OF... ANOTSU-DONO.
HOW COULD IT TURN OUT THIS WAY!
WHERE... WHERE DID I GO WRONG...?!
I UNDER-STAND... NO-THING...
THE ONLY THING I KNOW IS....
I HEARD MY... MASTER'S DYING WISH...
...AND FAILED HIM.

KENSUI-DONO...!
koff!
koff!
A... ANOTSU-DONO...
I... I AM FINISHED. I HAVE... NO MORE TO SAY.
I DON'T ASK FORGIVE-NESS... I HAVE NO RIGHT.
ONLY, PITY THIS FOOLISH HEART...
THIS SHAMEFUL CHOICE... I WAS FORCED TO MAKE...
AND IF YOU UNDER-STAND, PLEASE... BE MY SECOND.

KENSUI-DONO...
.....
.....
.....


NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU CARED FOR HER...
...YOU WERE A FOOL TO BETRAY YOUR OWN HONOR.

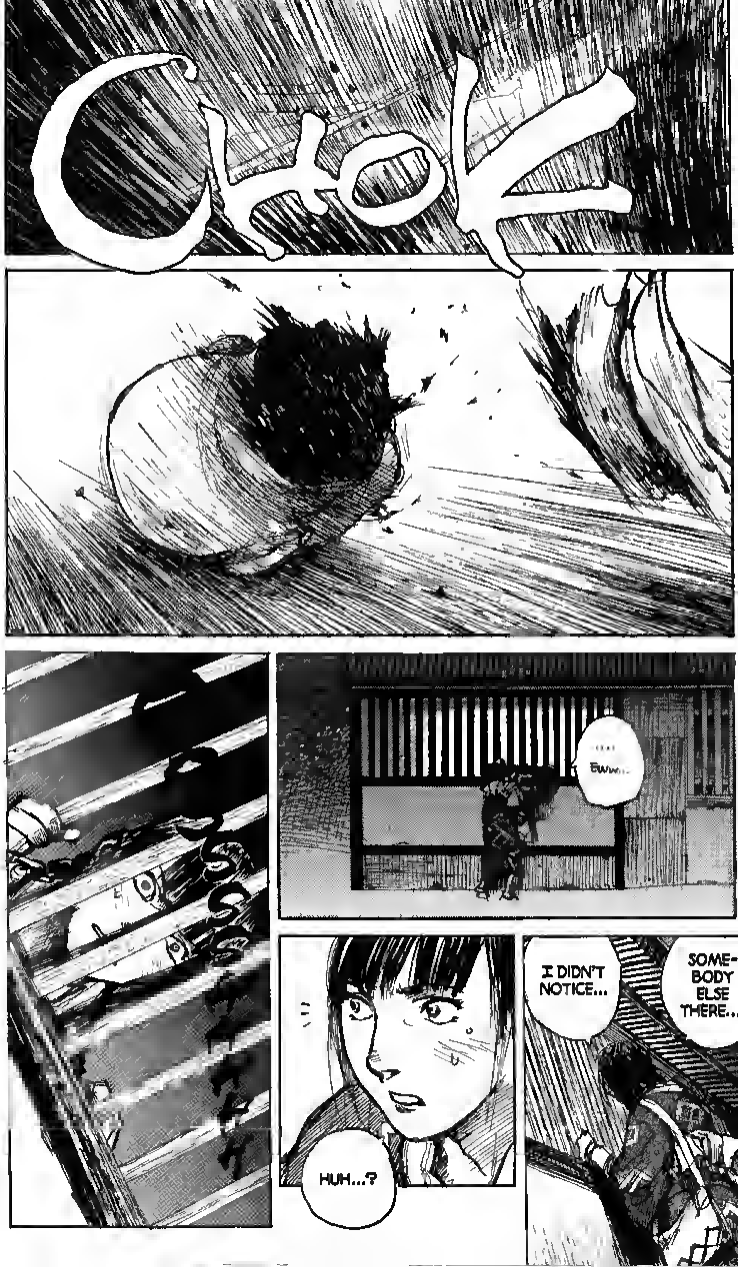

A WARRIOR CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS. IT'S MAKING THAT CHOICE THAT MEASURES OUR WORTH. IF THE TRUE PATRIOTS OF THIS LAND HEARD YOU WERE A PRISONER OF YOUR FEELINGS...
...THEY WOULD BE STAG-GERED.

.....
.....
.....
AND YET...

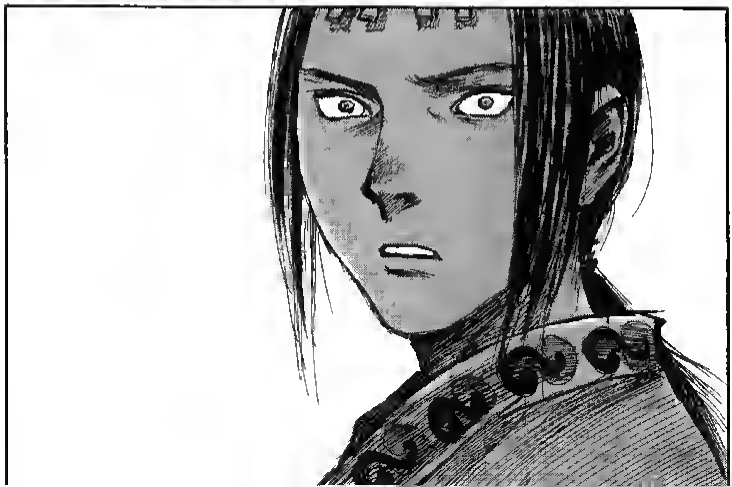
WHAT I SEE IN YOU NOW...
...IS WHAT I SAW IN MYSELF, BUT FOUR DAYS PAST.

"MY OWN HONOR I THOUGHT SO UNSHAKEABLE. MY DOJO. MY COMRADES...
"AND THAT DESPICABLE EMOTION, POWERFUL. MATCHLESS. PUSHING ALL ELSE ASIDE."
KENSUI-DONO! TODAY YOU COMMITTED A GRIEVOUS ERROR.
YOU STRAYED FROM THE PATH A SAMURAI SHOULD ALWAYS FOLLOW.
BUT THAT CRIME IS NOT ONE....
...THAT I HAVE ANY RIGHT TO CONDEMN.

I WILL BE YOUR SECOND.
KENSUI-*DONO...!*


CHOKE
Ewww...
I DIDN'T NOTICE...
SOME-BODY ELSE THERE...?
HUM...?

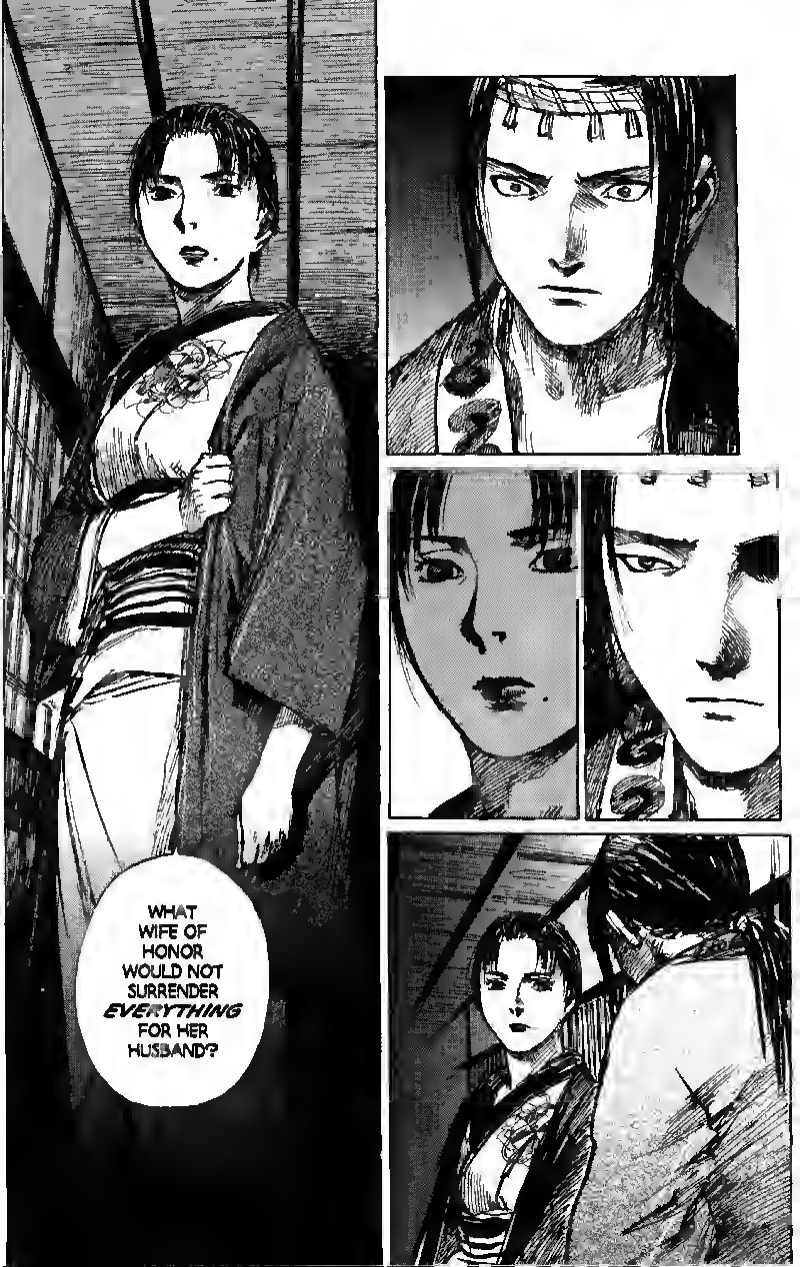
A...
A
WOMAN...?



I HEARD... MOST OF IT.
NO. NO...
LET ME EX--

LISTEN... IT'S A RULE OF THE DOJO. AFTER AFTERNOON PRACTICE AND BEFORE THE EVENING BATH...
...KOZUE ALWAYS REPORTS TO KENSUI ON THE DAY'S PROGRESS.
SO... SOON ENOUGH...
...THIS WILL BE DISCOVER-ED.
AND BEFORE IT IS...
...IT WOULD BE WISE FOR YOU TO BE GONE.
IF YOU USE THE FRONT GATE, THEY'LL TRACK YOU EASILY.
LEAVE FROM THE BACK AND FOLLOW THE RIDGELINE OF THE MOUNTAIN.
.....
MY THANKS.

IF... YOU HEARD...
...THEY ALL COME TO PASS.
IF I FLEE...
KENSUI-DONO'S FEARS FOR YOU.
WHY HELP ME ESCAPE?
KAGE-HISA!
I AM A SAMURAI, AND YOUR WIFE!

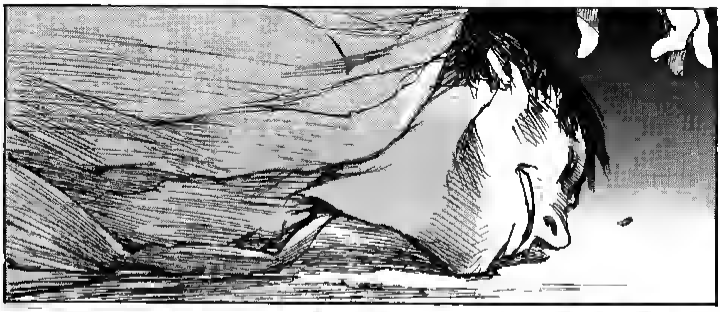

WHAT WIFE OF HONOR WOULD NOT SURRENDER *EVERYTHING* FOR HER HUSBAND?

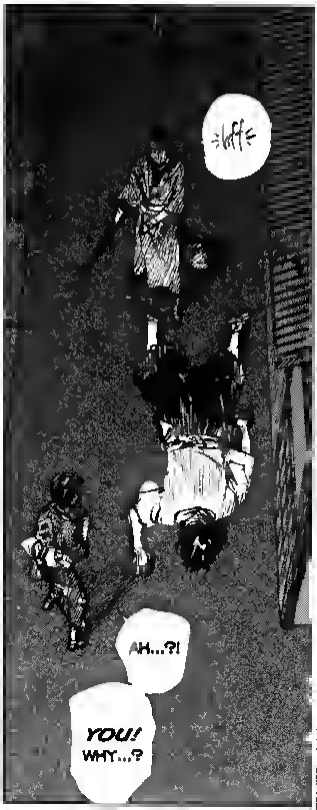
.....
F...
FAREWELL.

??
EH?

HE'S GONE...
GET A GRIP, YOU IDIOT!
FOLLOW HIM!!
WHERE'S THE BACK GATE
THAP
GULP!

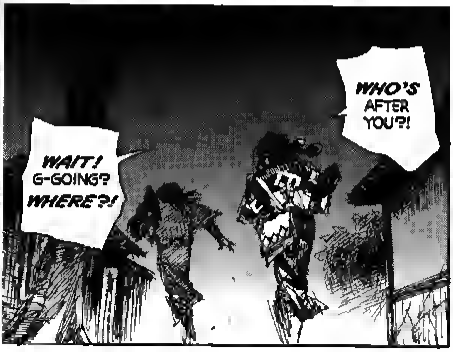
WHATCHA DOIN' HERE?
UH... WELL... ACTUAL-LY...
JUST A SEC...
THIS COMPOUND'S BEEN AT FULL ALERT SINCE MORNIN'...!
IF YOU AIN'T GOT A DAMN GOOD ANSWER, YER IN DEEP SHIT.
SO WHATCHA GOT TO SAY, HUH?!
WELL, I... UM... LOOK!
WHOO SH




=ff=
AH...?!
YOU!
WHY...?

WHAT IN THE WORLD...
...ARE YOU DOING HERE?!

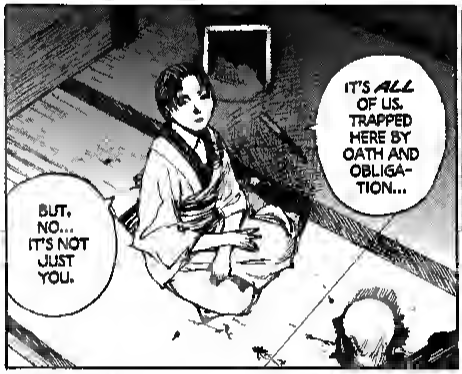
I TOLD YOU, I'M FOLLOW-ING--
THEY'RE AFTER ME. I'M GOING!


WHO'S AFTER YOU?!
WAIT! G-GOING? WHERE?!

STEP-FATHER... THANK YOU.
THANK YOU FOR A FLEETING MOMENT OF... HAPPINESS.

I WAITED SO LONG FOR THAT MAN TO APPEAR.
SO *VERY* LONG...
THE MAN WHO COULD LEAD ME... NO...
...LEAD *US* FROM THIS DESOLATE MOUNTAIN.
BUT YOU KNOW, FATHER? AT THE SAME TIME, I SOMEHOW KNEW. FROM... OH, I CAN'T REMEMBER WHEN...
...THAT IF HE EVER *DID* APPEAR, HE WOULD JUST BE ANOTHER DREAM.
AND SO... ISN'T THAT *RIGHT?*
WHY *SHOULD* HE COME, AFTER TWENTY YEARS...?
FOR TWENTY LONG, LONELY *YEARS*...

...YOU LIVED IN THESE REMOTE MOUNTAINS, JUST TO KEEP YOUR PROMISE TO MY GRANDFATHER.
AND LOOK AT WHAT BECAME OF YOU... YOU POOR, FOOLISH MAN.


BUT, NO... IT'S NOT JUST YOU.
IT'S ALL OF US. TRAPPED HERE BY OATH AND OBLIGA-TION...

TO TELL THE TRUTH...
.....
.....

I KNEW IT FROM THE VERY BEGINNING. THE ONE WAY...
...THE SIMPLE WAY, TO SET US FREE.

I SHOULD HAVE CHOSEN THIS PATH... LONG AGO.

SPLITSH

TO BE CONTINUED...!

LETTERS

send letters to:

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL, c/o DARK HORSE COMICS,
10956 SE MAIN STREET MILWAUKIE, OREGON 97222
www.darkhorse.com • blade@darkhorse.com • www.studioproteus.com

GLOSSARY

bakufu also referred to as the "tent government" because soldiers lived in tents. A military arm of early Japanese government, concerned primarily with military and police matters.

dojo. a training center: a school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts.

han. in feudal domain

Itto-ryu: the radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa

ryu: A sword school

shinan: respected official instructor

In grand Somura style, two important, interesting characters are now gone with a "Chek" and a "Splussh"...so how will this affect Anotsu? Will we see a "kinder, gentler" leader of the Itto ryu? Or will this loss of friendship and love harden his heart even more...and lead to brutal repercussions? Now that Anotsu's personality is being fleshed out further by one honored storyteller...his relationship with Rin is bound to get even more hypnotically twisted. Ah, poor confused Rin. Now on to our latest batch of letters!

Blade Letters

I have something in response to the comment printed in "Fall Frost" asking whether or not Samura is a sadist. Well, as far as the torture and violence...has anyone ever seen the illustrations by Goya of the horrors inflicted on the Spanish under Napoleon invasion? He did very detailed drawings and etchings of mutilated corpses, but was it because he got off on blood and gore? Heh. I doubt that. Fact is, the world isn't a peaceful place...and Goya was trying to bring that to peoples' attention. How can we be expected to detest a vile act without first seeing WHY it's so detestable? I mean...of course...nobody likes to see murder (well...unless you're kind of screwed in the head)...but we're reminded of that when we see those nice close-ups of Samura fight scenes. The same goes for the rape and torture. He makes us hate it...makes us detest it even more than we did in the first place...and I see no problem with that. People look at things from the wrong angle, and as long as Samura himself isn't out there becoming the next big serial killer I think we can handle it. ^_^ But then...there ARE a lot of unsolved murders in the world...mayb couldn't be. Or...COULD it? Dun dun DUNNN (I keep you on the edge of your seat, yes?) Wow, that was long and pointless. I was almost sure I was going somewhere with it, but hey, give me a break. It's 2:30 a.m. and I have insomnia.

Beth B.
via e-mail

The imaginary brutality in *Blade of the Immortal* serves several purposes, on both symbolic and storytelling levels. The "Heart of Darkness" storyline (*Blade* #s 35 to 42) polarizes the differences between Manji, who "toed the line" between hero and villain earlier in this epic tale, and Shira, who fell off the precipice into violent insanity long before Magatsu's allies caused him to fall into a real one (see *Blade* #78). "Heart of Darkness" illustrates how evil Shira really is...and allows the reader to become just as eager to see revenge realized as Manji and Magatsu. The "Beasts" storyline (*Blade* as 66 to 72) contains some of the most depraved, disgusting elements yet, but the "payoff" comes on the final page of *Blade* #71, in a whirling moment of heartbreaking, Pyrrhic victory. "Beasts" seems to set Hyakurin up for her own quest against the Itto-ryu, providing brief, interesting digressions into Hyakurin's past and further questioning the validity of Anotsu's own quest with his Itto-ryu "warriors." So we agree with you, Blair: in the overall picture, Samura's violent episodes add to his storytelling and are not simple gore glorifications. (Well, maybe not in these pages, but then there's Samura's erotic torture art...phew!—Tim)

Dear *Blade*

I love the Blade of the Immortal comics. I have them from the beginning, plus all the posters, trade paperbacks, Zippo lighters and T-shirts. So, with this sick but wonderful fixation, I began to search online to see how fast along they are in Japan. To my surprise, they are way ahead and I even found a site that has summaries. I found it very interesting that some of the issues were not being published or some story lines were not being shown. So a quick question: I was wondering if they are going to follow the International book till the way through, or are they going to skip issues? I have read Anotsu's wedding, yet they were showing issues that had Rin's track through the forest in more depth right before the wedding. Is there a plan to just skip over those issues and jump right to the meeting of Rin and Anotsu? Oh, another thing: I saw was a scene where Magatsu is being fixed up after his fight with Shira; will we ever see that through Dark Horse? Thanks so much for kickin' such great booty!

Erin Wachs
Salt Lake City, Utah

Hmm. Thanks for your letter, Erin, but it seems that you're mistaken about us skipping content. The Magatsu scene that you refer to occurs in the middle of *Blade* #78, as we see our flair-haired antihero being patched up just before the story gets back to Rin and her struggle through the woods over Mount Hakusan. Issue #78 thus gives us that bit with hungry Rin's trek in the forest before the wedding scene. Perhaps you missed that issue entirely? As editor Tim-dono says: "One comes ore in perfect order along with the Japanese tankauban books, so nothing's cut out." Just for your reference, issue #78 ("Fall Frost" part six) originally ran in the February 2000 issue of *Afternoon*. Also, when referring to scanlation" websites. It's good to remember that...given human error, some scenes might be posted in an incorrect order.

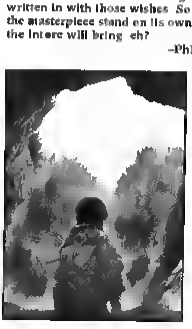
To Dark Horse Staff

I just want to congratulate you on bringing the best manga I've read in my life: *Blade of the Immortal* is just what the doctor ordered. Action, intrigue, and great artwork at its best. It would be cool if *Blade of the Immortal* would be adapted as an anime series. Keep up the wonderful job you're doing.

Angel Morales
via e-mail

Thanks for the kind words, Angel. Several readers have written in with those wishes. Sometimes it's best to let the masterpiece stand on its own, but who knows what the future will bring, eh?

—Philip-san and Tim-dono



NEXT MONTH:

"Thorns"